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SUBJECT: CENSUS PROVIDES INSIGHT INTO GUYANESE SOCIETY

[1](#)1. SUMMARY. The GoG released the results of Guyana's 2002 Population and Housing Census in October 2005. The census confirmed two demographic trends that will profoundly shape the country's political and economic development: a) total population is stagnant and predicted to fall; and b) the ethnic composition is changing, with potentially interesting consequences on Guyana's race-driven political environment. END SUMMARY.

Total Population: A Rush for the Exit

[1](#)2. The GoG released the final report of the 2002 Population and Housing Census in October 2005. Guyana's total population as of September 2002 was 751,223. This represents a 3.8 percent increase compared to the 1991 census total of 723,673, but a net decrease of 1.1 percent compared to 1980 population of 759,567.

[1](#)3. In the entire western hemisphere in the three decades between 1970 and 2000, only the islands of Montserrat and St. Kitts and Nevis recorded lower population growth than Guyana's 5 percent. By comparison, the population of the Caribbean region as a whole grew by 51 percent, the western hemisphere (including the U.S. and Canada) by 62 percent, and the U.S. by 35 percent over the same period.

[1](#)4. Why has Guyana come to a screeching halt, demographically speaking? Relentless outward migration to the U.S., Canada, the Caribbean and (less so now) the U.K. In a 2003 survey of 1,700 Guyanese high school students, 59 percent said they think they will leave Guyana permanently within ten years. Post's Consular Section issued more than 73,000 immigrant visas between 1992 and 2004, meaning that an average 0.8 percent of the population obtained an immigrant visa to the U.S. each year during that period. Even more migrate legally to Canada, UK, Caribbean, and even Africa (Botswana has been snapping up Guyanese teachers for more than a decade). Many others migrate illegally and are not caught in the statistics. Definitive numbers are elusive, but estimates of the total number of Guyana-born emigrants living abroad range from 500,000 to 1 million -- a massive diaspora relative to Guyana's resident population.

Survival Ratio Confirms Emigration Trend

[1](#)5. Guyana's survival ratio -- the percentage of a previous census' population reappearing in a subsequent census -- in 2002 revealed startling evidence of emigration's effect. The report's authors expected at least 90 percent of 0-19 year-olds in 1980 to have survived until the 2002 census. Instead, only 53 percent of these children and teenagers in 1980 were still living in Guyana in 2002 -- meaning that Guyana has lost almost half of its generation born from 1961 to 1980 that should now be in its prime productive years.

UN Foresees Drastically Shrinking Guyanese Population

[1](#)6. The latest UN "World Population Prospects" was released in February 2005. The prediction for Guyana is dire. The UN projected Guyana's population will be 488,000 in 2050 -- a 35 percent reduction from today's level. Only Ukraine will experience a greater proportional decline over the next 45 years. If the UN prediction is correct, by 2040 Guyana's population will be shrinking faster than anywhere else on the planet. Long-term projections of this nature are highly sensitive to modeling assumptions. But even a milder version of this forecast would put crippling strain on Guyana's capacity to sustain itself as a viable state.

Age Distribution: Getting Older

[1](#)7. Table of census results showing distribution of population by age.

Percent

Age Group	1980	1991	2002
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0-19	53.5	46.3	44.4
20-39	28.0	34.0	31.4
40-59	12.5	13.8	17.1
60+	5.7	5.9	6.3
Not Stated	0.3	0.0	0.7

18. The median age was 22.9 in 2002 compared to 18.6 in 1980. In 1980, 53.5 percent of the population was under 20 years old. This ageing trend will have negative long-term consequences. The report warns of "increased need for health, pension and national insurance provisions for the elderly, or policies governing/encouraging return migration". Guyana is ill-equipped to provide these social services under current circumstances, let alone when demand for them increases.

Race/Ethnic Composition: Amerindian, Mixed Heritage Grow

19. Table of census results showing distribution of population by race/ethnicity.

Background	Population (Percent of Total)		
	1980	1991	2002
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East Indian	394,417 (51.9)	351,939 (48.6)	326,395 (43.4)
African/Black	234,094 (30.8)	233,465 (32.3)	226,861
(30.2)			
Amerindian	40,343 (5.3)	46,722 (6.5)	68,819 (9.2)
Mixed Heritage	84,764 (11.2)	87,881 (12.1)	125,669 (16.7)
Other	5,948 (0.8)	3,664 (0.5)	3,479 (0.5)
Percent Change			
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Ethnic Background	1980-1991	1991-2002	
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East Indian	-10.8	-7.3	
African/Black	-0.3	-2.8	
Amerindian	15.8	47.3	
Mixed Heritage	3.7	43.0	
Other	-38.4	-5.0	

10. The number of self-identified East Indians declined by over 25,000 from 1991 to 2002, showing that they continued to emigrate in large numbers even after the PPP came to power in 1992. The East Indian population fell by 42,478 between 1980 and 1991 when the PNC was still in office. While still Guyana's largest ethnic group at 43.4 percent of the total population, this is a significant drop from 1991 when they comprised 48.6 percent.

11. The Amerindian population increased by almost half from 1991 to 2002, and they now make up over 9 percent of the total population. Guyana's Amerindians are far less likely to migrate and their fertility rates are higher than other Guyanese.

12. The number of people identifying themselves as of mixed heritage grew by 43 percent between 1991 and 2002. This growth probably reflects diminishing importance of traditional ethnicity-based social and political ties as well as more cross-ethnic relationships. In a country where race has been the primary driver of voting habits and the two main political parties have each taken its ethnic electorate for granted, more people who do not self-identify with one particular ethnic group may mean more votes across traditional ethnic party lines. With 17 percent of the population, the "mixed" constituency could shake up the political establishment.

Religion: Fewer Hindus, Protestant Groups Gain

13. Taken together, Christian denominations account for 56 percent of the population making Christians the largest single religious group. 28 percent of the total population is Hindu -- 40,000 fewer Hindus than in 1991. The number of Pentecostal Christians more than doubled between 1991 and 2002 with 17 percent of the population identifying themselves as Pentecostal in 2002. The absolute numbers of Muslims and Roman Catholics have both declined since 1991 -- Muslims now making up 7 percent and Catholics 8 percent of the population.

Comment

14. The census results and UN report point to a grim picture of Guyana's future -- a downward spiral of shrinking population in a weakening state. As more Guyanese emigrate, the pressure and opportunities increase for those who remain to follow abroad. Guyana is rich in natural resources (i.e., minerals, timber, and wildlife) and capable in agriculture, but poor in other economic sectors such as services and manufacturing. Entrepreneurs see little incentive to invest in businesses other than natural

resource extraction. Continued population decline will only exacerbate this fact. Of course, one group in particular has a strong vested interest in a sparsely populated, weaker Guyanese state -- the narco-traffickers.

15. Comment continued: The census does contain one potential silver lining. The uptick in those who self-report as mixed heritage may reflect frustration with Guyana's current racially-charged political climate. By translating this sentiment into votes for change, disaffected Guyanese could usher in a new era of more effective governance. End comment.

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